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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN MINISTRY OF LABOR LAUNCHES CALL CENTER

¶1. Summary: On April 3, the Ministry of Labor inaugurated a call center, funded by USDOL, to respond to public requests for information, provide legal consultations, and refer complaints to the Labor Inspectorate. Earlier the same day, USDOL-funded "Cumple y Gana" (Comply and Win) program launched the Labor Law Compliance Project, the third phase of its multi-year regional effort. The third phase focuses on strengthening labor inspections to improve compliance with labor laws and respect for labor rights. End Summary.

¶2. On April 3, Minister of Labor Edgar Rodriguez inaugurated a call center for the Ministry to provide public information and legal consultation on labor issues. The center will also receive complaints for immediate referral to the Labor Inspectorate for verification. Staffed by five legal professionals, the call center will operate from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, at no cost to callers.

¶3. The call center is an initiative of USDOL-funded "Cumple y Gana," a regional project aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity of CAFTA-DR labor ministries and raising public awareness of labor rights. Since the start of the project in 2003, "Cumple y Gana" has installed call centers in the labor ministries of all the CAFTA-DR countries.

¶4. Minister Rodriguez commented that the call center will help resolve questions not only from workers but also from employers and other callers who seek information on domestic labor legislation and international conventions and norms. He noted that the Ministry for several years has had a designated line for public inquiries, consultations, and complaints, but that it was inadequate to meet the growing demands of the public. During the first week of testing, the call center registered a large number of calls. The most commonly asked questions concerned issues such as dismissals, work hours, breastfeeding hours, labor permits, and bonuses.

¶5. Earlier the same day, "Cumple y Gana" launched the Labor Law Compliance Project, a USD 8.8 million, four-year (October 2008 ) September 2012), regional project. According to Project Director Rodolfo Piza, the project strategy is to promote awareness and application of labor laws and standards among inspectors, other government officials, workers, and employers. The project will focus on increasing the quantity and quality of labor inspections to improve compliance with labor laws and respect for labor rights. Specific goals include more efficient and more focused inspections, better trained inspectors, better protocols for labor inspections, more corrective actions, and improved communication.

¶6. Roberto Ardon, Executive Director of the Coordinating Committee for the Chambers of Agriculture, Commerce, Industry, and Finance (CACIF), complimented Cumple y Gana, focus on inspection as "very constructive and creative," particularly in a region such as Central America that is fraught with sensitive labor conflicts. He noted that there

is  
widespread perception that labor inspections are ineffective.  
He stressed that the attitudes of workers and employers need to change to foster communication, and that preventive actions are equally as important as corrective actions.

¶7. Labor Inspector General Giovanni Soto emphasized the importance of unifying the government, employer, and employee sectors through the Tripartite Commission. He stated that the Labor Ministry will soon be signing a cooperative agreement with the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS) to conduct joint inspections at work sites. A workers' representative stressed that CACIF is not their enemy and that their goal is to minimize labor conflicts by working together with the private sector.

¶8. Comment: The inauguration of a call center at the Labor Ministry is a significant development that should help raise public awareness among workers as well as employers and improve respect for labor rights. The launch of the "Cumple y Gana" project focusing on labor inspections, a notable weakness in Guatemala, should help reduce labor conflict and improve enforcement of and compliance with labor laws.  
McFarland